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Our Standards and Their Teaching  
as Bearing on Marriage

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AS BEARING ON

# MARRIAGE

WITH

THE SISTER OF A DECEASED WIFE,

CONSIDERED IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE  
AND COMMON SENSE.

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, COBURG, ON THE EVENING  
OF SABBATH, 26TH OCTOBER, 1873.

WITH APPENDIX,

CONTAINING BRIEF STRICTURES ON DR. CAMERON'S PAMPHLET.

BY

REV. JOHN COOPER,

*Author of "Science of Spiritual Life," "Truth in its own Light," &c.*

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Melbourne:

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**Just Published, by the same Author,**

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**A CATECHISM OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

**FOR**

**BIBLE CLASSES, HIGHER CLASSES IN SABBATH SCHOOLS,  
SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHERS, AND ADVANCED PUPILS.**

**IN THREE PARTS.**

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**Preparing for Publication, by the same Author,**

**THE PROVINCE OF LAW IN THE RECOVERY OF MAN.**

ms. 92-91  
Marriage with the Sister of a Deceased Wife.

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"Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time."—LEVIT. xviii. 18.

OUR lot is cast in times of change. Changes, deeper and broader far than the unobservant imagine, are passing over us—changes affecting almost every department of literature, science, philosophy, politics, religion, and life. The Church, during the last fifty years, has undergone a very considerable change in sentiment and condition. Nor are we to be surprised at changes occurring in the Church, or in the condition of man upon earth. They are necessary to his passing from evil to good, from self to God. Changes are to be looked for in the Church—and by the Church we are not to understand any one of the denominations, but the professed faiths of Christendom, or the regenerated of God on earth. By the one we are to understand the formal, by the other the true, Church of Christ.

Change is the condition of the Church on earth; the necessity of her development in time. The Church is the germ of spiritual vitality cast into the soil of the world, and, by means of the changes through which the Church is passing, God is showing "*to principalities and powers in heavenly places His manifold wisdom.*" And if we learn aright the history of the Church as she passes through the changes of her progressive development, we will be constrained to exclaim with Paul, "*O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His designs, and His ways are past finding out: for who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor, or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? for of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*"

ms. 92-91  
In such a state of things we are not, on the one hand, to "be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive," nor, on the other hand, to be indifferent to "*the signs of the times.*" Our duty is to attend to the operations of God's doings in the earth, and rest in the conviction that He who shed His blood to found His Church, and ascended to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens that He might receive the investiture of all power in heaven and earth for the good of His Church, is more deeply interested in her progress than any individual or any

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denomination of the Church of Christ, and is, by means of the changes and trials of her earthly condition, removing those things in her "*which are to be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain;*" and is thus guiding her onward to her glorious consummation of millennial perfection and bliss.

We are to rest in the conviction that the Church is passing through such changes as are necessary to her perfection in the outcome of her inner life; and that she will be defended and guided so as in the end to appear before the world "*fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.*"

Controversy, which is her necessary ordeal, is not in itself an evil, but the fire of her purification and strength. It is the "*odium theologicum*" with which controversy is so often conducted that is to be deplored. It is matter of surprise and grief that so many controversialists should forget what manner of spirit they are of, and imagine that the bitterness of their ire and fury of their wrath is the holy unction of the spirit of truth. They should ever have hung in their view the words of the heathen poet, "*Tantæ animis coelestibus iræ*" ("Dwells there such wrath in heavenly minds"), or the reply of Christ to the disciples when they were for bringing down fire from heaven to consume those they imagined were against them, or when they were for hindering another from casting out devils because he followed not with them.

We shall endeavour to keep these things in view as we proceed to the investigation of the disputed and agitated question of marriage with the sister of a deceased wife, announced for discussion to-night. In connection with this theme, or as forming a part of this discussion, it will be necessary in the first place to inquire, What is the position of standards of belief among brethren? or, What is the legitimate influence of creeds in the Church of Christ?

Creeds or standards of belief are necessary to the union and co-operation of men of imperfect discernment, and to the protection of the Christian Church from the errors of schismatics and assaults of foes. As long as the Church was without division of sentiment and error of belief, there was no room for creeds, the apostolic influence and writings of inspiration were all that were needed; but the moment that error crept in, and division sprung up in the Church, that moment brought with it the necessity of a creed around which the adherents of truth might rally, and exhibit their opposition to the error that was assailing the truth; and the circumstances which necessitated the introduction of creeds into the Church require their continuance in it still.

A human creed is man's interpretation of one or more portions of inspired Scripture, or the view of certain doctrines of Holy Writ taken by the ecclesiastics of a particular time. A creed is thus necessarily an *imperfect* and partial, if not a one-sided, view of Divine truth. Creeds are the human husks which contain in them

the seed of Divine truth, and must be broken for the outcome and development of the germ of the inner life of the Church. And our Church has had the grace given to her, in her entering into her united form, to set an example to other churches of modifying standards as the times require ; and, in so doing, she has acted in the spirit and on the advice of the wise men of God who formed her standards. In the Confession of Faith, chapter xxxi., section 4, we read thus—"All synods and councils since the apostles' time, whether general or particular, may err and may have erred ; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as our help in both." See also section 5. In this section we have the key furnished to the true spirit in which the enlightened ecclesiastic gives his adherence to the Confession of Faith.

Forms of doctrine, like the human body, must ever be undergoing change for the progress of the life of the Church. No formal embodiment of truth can ever fully express the *real* truth, and much less can any finite form of truth give full expression to infinite truth. As God, in His providence over His Church, develops the deeper depths of His truth to angels and men, there arises from time to time the necessity of change in the ecclesiastical forms of truth. There is no stereotyped form of Christian doctrine but the inspired Scriptures themselves, nor can the Church with *safety* acknowledge any other. And if any denomination refuse to modify her Confessions as the development of truth requires, God will do it for her as in the Reformation, the rise of the Associated and Relief Churches, the outcome of the Non-intrusionists, 1843, &c. We are now prepared for the inquiry—

What is the position of our standards in connection with the question of marriage with the sister of a deceased wife, and our reply is—*It is one that stands greatly in need of remodelling*, as we shall endeavour to show.

There were no laws in any of the nations, affecting marriage, until the Mosaic legislation took the matter up. Nay, it is even questioned by learned men whether the prohibitions in the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus refer to marriage at all. It must be known to well-read men that Sir William Jones, one of the highest authorities on the customs of antiquity among heathen nations, states as his belief that the prohibitions in the Mosaic code have no reference to marriage relationships at all, but were intended simply to prevent among the Jews the revolting practices common among members of the same families in the surrounding nations of heathenism, and because of which the land vomited out the people. Individuals married in accordance with taste, convenience, and prejudice. But to proceed on the view of the Confession.

Adam married bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh—the very flesh and bone taken out of his own body. His sons married their own full sisters—the younger of them may have married their nieces. Abraham, *the friend of God*, married his own half-sister.



Abraham's brother married his own niece. Jacob married two sisters, cousins of his own by his mother's side. Judah married his own daughter-in-law, from the offspring of which marriage sprang our Lord Himself. Amram married his aunt, his father's sister.

And like marriages prevailed among the Gentiles. The Athenians married half-sisters by the father's side. The Spartans married half-sisters by the mother's side. The Assyrians and Egyptians married full sisters. The Persians, Medians, Indians, and Ethiopians allowed marriage with mothers, daughters, and sisters. In the earlier periods of human history there was no restriction on marriage with relations. And marriage with near of kin seems to have been the common practice. The only hindrance was, not from marrying relations, but from going beyond them in marriage. There was a strong aversion to marriage with strangers, women of other tribes and creeds. Hence the call for Moses' interference.

Moses took a broad, comprehensive view of things around him. He saw the state of the Gentile world and of the Jewish nation; he felt the need there was of reformation, but he also knew that any attempt at radical change would be hopeless. His object was as far as possible to restrain and ameliorate. He, or rather God in him, knew that the Israelites were *incapable* of being raised into a high condition of spiritual religion or social morality, and that any attempt to do so would only make matters worse with them than they were. And the sequel of the Jewish history shows the wisdom of the divine legislation by Moses. God, in His requirements of men, does not overlook their circumstances, or require of man what he is unable to perform.

The Jews came far short of even what Moses required of them. If, then, a higher standard, such as perfection demanded, had been given to them, what would have been the result? Their backsliding would have been all the greater, their transgressions the more numerous, their guilt the more heinous, their condition the more disastrous, and their reform the more hopeless. Hence many things which were not commended, far less approved, were *tolerated* among them on account of the hardness of their hearts.

Why, then, did God *wink* at certain things among the Gentiles, and *suffer* others among the Jews? Because centuries were to intervene ere on Calvary the only *power* which can *melt* the hardness of the human heart and enable man to repent, would be created. And this is the only power that can speak effectively to the heart. Law may restrain, but it can never melt or change the human heart. Hence, until this power was created, God did not call upon "*all men everywhere to repent.*" Moses, then, because of the *hardness* of their hearts, *suffered* many things among the Jews which were *beneath* the highest standard of morality and religion. And marriage with the sister of a deceased wife was one of them. Our standards, then, which demand compliance with the

highest condition of morality and religion, are and must be at variance with Moses. This prepares us for our next inquiry,

Is our Confession correct or incorrect in its comprehension of the law of Moses? It is incorrect: the compilers of our Confession fell into a serious error when they took for granted that Moses legislated for a perfect condition of moral and religious life among the Jews.

Our Confession is incorrect in its view of the *purpose* of the law of Moses. The compilers of the Confession, and those who uphold it as it is, take for granted that Moses legislated for a *perfect* condition of social and religious life, whereas he legislated so as to restrain, as far as circumstances permitted, the evils of a *semi-barbarian social condition and a foreshadowing religious state*. This error of the compilers vitiates the whole teaching of the Confession on the question of marriage. The purpose of Moses is not so easily discerned as many commentators suppose.

Some imagine that he legislated on the question of marriage to promote the physical vigour of the race, which is not unlikely.

Others suppose that conjugal love destroys natural affection, and that Moses legislated for the defence of natural affection. How they come to the opinion that conjugal love destroys natural affection they do not tell us, and it is difficult to conceive. They may with as much propriety tell us that the love existing after marriage between husband and wife destroys the love they had for one another before marriage. Will or can any man in the exercise of his common sense believe that the love which man and wife cherish to one another destroys the love which drew them into the relation of husband and wife?

Others assert that it was to protect family purity.

Others, again, suppose that it was to widen the circle of human affections.

Perhaps it was a purpose profounder than any or all of these, embracing what is true in them, and a great deal more—a purpose which, when understood, will be seen to be worthy of God. It was a purpose evidently foreshadowing better things to come; for, viewed in itself, the legislation of Moses was, as declared by Peter, a yoke which “*neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.*”

The Confession is incorrect in its *interpretation* of the law of Moses, for it makes Moses teach that affinity is the same as consanguinity—in other words, that relationship in affinity is as near in blood as relationship in consanguinity; and this is the opinion clung to by the upholders of the Confession in its entirety. But this is a doctrine which contradicts the common sense of mankind, and could not have been the doctrine of Moses. It is a doctrine as absurd as, and requires to be placed side by side with, the doctrines of *Transubstantiation* and *Consubstantiation*—doctrines which require man to believe in opposition to his common sense and rational dictates.

To tell a man that his wife's sister is as near in blood to him as his own sister, is to assert what reason revolts from ; and to endeavour to persuade men that such is the teaching of God's Word, is only to do what is calculated to induce them to sneer at revelation, and join the ranks of infidelity. When will men distinguish between superstition and simple belief in God's Word? This mode of interpreting the law of Moses, happily for the cause of inspired Scripture, breaks down when applied to the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus.

The *inference* of the Confession is equally incorrect, viz., that the man who marries the sister of his deceased wife is guilty of an *incestuous* deed. This is the opinion of those who hold to the Confession in its integrity.

An inference which Moses guards against in the *text* :—“*Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness beside the other, in her life time.*” The marginal reading is somewhat different, which is “one wife to another.” The textual reading, however, is the correct one. It is the rendering which is supported by all the ancient versions, and by the great majority of learned and judicious interpreters of all countries and times. Indeed, so obviously is the textual rendering the true one, that no other would ever have been thought of, had it not been felt that it opposes the Church doctrine.

If the marginal reading be the true rendering, then does Moses contradict himself ; for the marginal reading forbids a plurality of wives—a thing that Moses everywhere allows. The prohibition of the text is the marrying of a sister of a wife *in her lifetime*. The text neither enjoins nor forbids such a marriage *after the death of the wife*. The most learned commentators are of opinion that the words “*beside the other in her lifetime*” distinctly teach, by implication, the lawfulness of such a marriage. And the ground of this prohibition seems not only to be the unseemliness of the thing itself, but also the jealousy and strife which such a marriage caused in the family of Jacob.

The *result* of the Confession's teaching is the most objectionable of all ; for, on the teaching of the Confession, there is no evading the idea—that *God is the Author of sin*.

This is the conclusion to which intelligent individuals, reasoning on the matter, cannot help coming, if they take the teaching of the Confession in connection with the command contained in the fifth and on to the sixteenth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy.

In this passage we have not a simple permission, but a definite command, that the brother of the deceased husband shall marry his widow, and raise up seed unto his brother. And what is the object for which this command (which, on the teaching of the Confession, we cannot but regard as a command to do an immoral deed, *i.e.*, to commit a sin) is given? It is to perpetuate the name of his brother !

Could not the brother, as the nearest heir of his deceased brother, have assumed his name, and entered upon the inheritance of his property, and pensioned his sister-in-law, or widow of his brother, during her lifetime? This simple arrangement, which is so natural as to be almost a universal law of nations, would have secured the same end, and would have avoided the somewhat strange marriage—a marriage which, if we are to look upon the marriage of a sister of a deceased wife as an incestuous thing, then must we regard this marriage as more incestuous still. Certainly, if the Confession's view of such marriages be correct, we may infer that Moses—the wisest of legislators—would have adopted this or some other method of meeting the difficulty.

There is no getting rid of the conclusion that if the marrying of the sister of a deceased wife be an incestuous and sinful act, then the marrying of the widow of a deceased brother by his next brother is a more incestuous and sinful deed; for, if there be a difference, the indelicacy is greater in the latter than in the former, especially if it be the marrying of a deceased brother's widow, not by one, but by *six* brothers, as in the case referred to our Lord by the Sadducees; for whatever objections there be to the widower of a deceased wife marrying her sister, there is a far greater objection to six brothers marrying the widow of their elder deceased brother. And it is most noticeable that our Divine Lord, in whom dwelt all wisdom—(who, when He said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery," immediately added these words—"But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart")—when He decided on the case brought forward by these Sadducees, never dropped a hint or breathed a word implying immorality or incest in such marriages.

Are we, then, to be forced into the belief that Moses, or rather God by Moses, to secure a trifle—nay, a nonentity (for in the case referred to our Lord by the Sadducees it turned out to be such)—went out of His way to command an incestuous deed, to enjoin the commission of a gross sin? There was no *principle in morals*, no *law of religion*, requiring one brother to marry the widow of the other that had died childless. And if, as in the case referred to by the Sadducees, the childlessness of the deceased brother was traceable, not to him, but to his wife, there was no perpetuation of his name, there was nothing but an incestuous connection and sinful life secured by the command given in the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy. Are we, then, to believe that God would have commanded six—nay, it might have been ten, twelve, or more—brothers to enter upon and to live incestuous lives with one and the same woman for no object whatever. And yet such is the absurdity to which a blind adherence to the tradition of their fathers drives some.

Such a method of treating the Word of God does violence to

our moral nature, shocks our religious convictions. And if we are to view the matter as those who declare the marriage of a sister of a deceased wife incestuous would have us, then there is no escape from doing violence to our own religious convictions, and of presenting the Word of God to others in such a manner as will induce them to turn away from it with loathing and disgust. Thanks be to God that in His great mercy He has preserved us from such an awful calamity.

We have only to cast our prejudices away from us, rise superior to the traditions of men, refuse to become idolators of human standards, and come to the study of the Scriptures "*as newborn babes, desirous of the sincere milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby,*" and we will behold the glory of God in His word, such divine majesty in the Scriptures, as will constrain us to acknowledge their heavenly source, see them to be worthy of God, adapted to our true nature and circumstances, the true source of morality, and the only means of religion.

Do we, then, advocate marriage with a deceased wife's sister? No more than we do with the widow of a deceased brother. What we desire is, to do all in our power to preserve the Scriptures from perversion, and the Church from occupying a false position. The entrance into marriage with the sister of a deceased wife is not without risk, and those who contract such marriages are not likely to be without "*trouble in the flesh.*" If the encouraging of such marriages does not endanger family purity, it is calculated to mar the delicacy of the sweet and lovely intercourse of the household circle. If it does not awaken in the calm and amiable breast of the gentle wife the emotion of burning jealousy towards a lovely sister, it is sure to interfere with the free and unfettered intercourse of relations in life. Nor can the vague possibility of the aunt proving a better stepmother than another woman compensate in the family for the evils that may otherwise arise. If the aunt-stepmother should have no children of her own, she is likely to prove the better stepmother; but if she become a mother herself, then the chances are in the other direction.

Those who defend the doctrine of the Confession of Faith lay great stress on the saying of John the Baptist in his condemnation of Herod for having his brother Philip's wife, and on Paul's rebuke of the Corinthian Church for tolerating in their communion one guilty of gross sin. It is amazing how intelligent scholars will allow themselves to be carried away by feelings which withdraw them from the perception of the force of a word. Neither the Baptist nor the Apostle speak of the unlawfulness of having the *widow*, but of the *sin* of having the wife of another man, and of this sin being greatly aggravated by the fact that the women they had in these connections were—one, the *wife* of a brother; the other, of a father; and in this lies the difference. Indeed, the cases of Herod and of the unnatural son, as read by the upholders of the Confession, have no bearing on the matter in dispute; but,

as read by their opponents, the case of Herod has a very *direct and important* bearing on the question, for Mark tells us that John said to Herod, "*It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.*" Now, as Herodias was the niece of her first husband, according to their interpretation of the law of Moses, John, as an upholder of the Levitical law, could not have *recognised* her as *the wife* of Philip, for she was not, in their view of the law of Moses, the lawful wife of her uncle. But John did view her as the wife of Philip, and therefore John could not have held their view of Moses' law.

Let us look for a moment at consanguinity and affinity. We have said that the two are not identical. Affinity is higher, more comprehensive, and diviner than consanguinity. This we may be able to illustrate by a reference to voluntarism as contrasted with establishments. While establishments are far inferior to voluntarism, they in a "*carnal*" state of religion secure a far greater amount of good than voluntarism does. They prevent the giving with grudging—doling out as if parting with drops of heart-blood; they prevent an empty exchequer in the house of God; they prevent the jealousy, rivalry, and strife of small, struggling congregations contending for existence, and which, instead of cherishing towards each other the spirit of brotherly love, exhibit a spirit more from beneath than from above.

But, in a high state of grace, voluntarism is by far the lovelier of the two. It acts not by the constraint of external law, but by the impelling power of glowing love. It allows scope for the full expression of adoring gratitude—for enlightened compliance with felt obligation; it affords opportunity for strengthening the graces of the divine life in the soul—of displaying zeal for the glory of God in promoting the highest well-being of fellow-men; it feeds, matures, and beautifies the inner life of the Church.

And so in a worldly, selfish state of society, consanguinity reigns and secures the greatest amount of good, more than affinity can in such a condition of human life. In such a state of society the old proverb will hold true—"Blood is thicker than water." And in this we perceive a manifestation of God's wisdom and goodness. As man descends in the scale of life, he enslaves himself the more to law. This was understood by Moses. He looked abroad on the heathen world, and saw it struggling in vain with the law of its bondage, for by selfishness and idolatry it only sank deeper and deeper into the depths of servitude to self and sin. He felt for Israel, and imposed on it the restraints of a higher law than that of self and sin, that he might retard it in its downward course. But in this he only put on the brake as tight as the mechanism of the descending locomotion could bear, at the same time giving to the Jew a glimpse of a higher and holier state, as he foreshadowed "*better things to come.*"

In certain states of social life, marriage with the sister of the deceased wife is the necessity of the bereaved father and husband.

He is left in such abject poverty and helplessness that he is obliged to call the sister of his departed wife to his own and the assistance of his children. With his limited surroundings, and in these circumstances, a speedy marriage is the least of the evils that are likely to ensue.

The principle of affinity, however, secures for the social circle of humanity a loftier, purer, and more blessed condition of life than consanguinity does or can do. It inbreathes into the individual life of man the diviner, brotherlier, and universal affection; it enlarges the sphere of human love, and ennobles the life of man. It lifts him out of the selfish, the false, and superstitious, by introducing him into the true, the self-sacrificing, the God-like. And just as Christianity advances, will the nations be raised into the realisation of the higher conditions of affinity.

The duty of the Church is not to intermeddle with the political affairs of the State, or by a mistaken zeal for purity to attempt by forms of discipline to coerce her members into the life of love. By so doing she only attempts an impossibility, and secures an opposite result. In such efforts she mistakes her mission, loses her enviable opportunities of doing her Master's work, enslaves herself in the trammels of superstition, and fails in the end of her high calling of God. Her members are not to cherish the spirit of thanking God that they are not like other men, each demanding of his brother that he comply with his interpretation of inspired truth, else he will anathematise, and refuse to hold brotherly intercourse with him.

Such would be to act on a principle that would prevent union in the Church of Christ, co-operation of brethren—a principle which only divides and destroys. The disciples of Jesus are to pursue the things which make for peace, the things wherewith they edify one another. They are to forbear with one another in love; to walk together, in so far as they are agreed, in the confidence that by so doing God will bring them into oneness in the things regarding which they differ.

By so doing the members of the Church will present to the world such a spectacle of heavenly power, commanding majesty, Christian love, as will draw its attention to the power of its regeneration created for its salvation by the Incarnate Lord of Glory, yielding to its enmity on the cross of Calvary—the power which alone can awaken in the heart of man supreme love to God, fellow-love to his brother; draw men out of their selfishness into the true knowledge of human well-being; and thus glorify Christ, save souls, secure a lovely and blissful condition of human society on earth.

If, on the other hand, ecclesiastics forget what manner of spirit they ought to be of, cling to their individual or party shibboleths, wrangle about hair-splittings, denounce and anathematise one another, hear not the voice of God speaking to them in the events of His providence in connection with His Church, then will they

display the worst form and darkest spirit of superstition, and do the work, not of Christ, but of Belial.

The times are ominous for the Church. Portentous clouds, heavily charged with dangerous and threatening fire, are gathering in thickening gloom over her horizon; and hence the need, on the part of the Church, of the *wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove*. Ecclesiastics should be more than ordinarily cautious of not placing the Church in a *false position* before the view of the world; for never were the masses of the people passing from within her pale as they are now doing; never were the enemies of Christianity so panoplied, arrayed, united, energetic, and mustered in such scientific battle array, as they at present are. But little do they perceive that the firebrands which they are so actively and thickly scattering over the ranks of an ignorant and erroneous civilisation, to destroy the Church of Christ, are the very elements which, while they will scorch the Church, will consume themselves—destroy, as adversaries, the *worldly millions* of a nominal Christianity.

What, however, the Church has most to dread is, not the attacks of her infidel or semi-infidel foes, but the *mistaken Christianity* of her weak, though well-meaning, friends. This has been the means of her greatest weakness, in all ages—the incubus which clogs her strength, retards her progress, and sullies her beauty—an incubus which requires an almost convulsive effort to throw off, but of which she must rid herself, ere she will appear in the glory of her Lord, and become the joy of the whole earth.

Christianity in danger! Yes, when the Self-existent God and all finite being have perished in an utter annihilation! She is founded on a rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. She is too dear to the Father, Son, and Spirit; she has cost the Godhead too precious blood, and her sons too much suffering, to be neglected by the One or forsaken by the others. Her trials, her groans, her self-sacrifices, are the means of her existence, her purification, and strength. She was born in pangs; she has been cradled in persecutions; she grows, thrives, triumphs in self-sacrifice. She has already triumphed over the most subtle, artful, powerful of enemies; she has overcome the most formidable oppositions possible to her; she has passed through the severest trials that can assail her; and she has proved herself superior to every opposition.

And the ordeal which now awaits her is one that she is more than equal to. The ordeal of a scientific scorching is what she longs for. Such will bring her forth from the encumbrances of superstition, all radiant in the glorious robes of her scientific light. Do the admirers of science, who are hurling their fragments of discovery against the truths of Scripture, know, or will they allow themselves to perceive, that Christianity is the most scientific thing in existence—the all-comprehensive science of being—the science which embraces within her the science



of matter, mind, and spirit—the science of all finite existence—the science of the Eternal Council? She is the profound science of Godhead; and the noblest employment that science can devote itself to, is the study of the Gospel of the Son of God.

The duty of a Church, when a difference of opinion arises within her pale, regarding either the scripturalness of her standards or the exact nature of their teaching, is to make the matter in dispute one of forbearance, until clearer light is given to her—light which will enable her to understand more fully the teaching of revelation, and bring her standards into unity with Scripture doctrine.

This, at all times, is the clear and well-defined duty of a Church in such circumstances, and especially so when there are grave misgivings if there be one of her ministers or congregations who literally conform to her standards or directories. The words of St. Augustine should have weight for us at this hour—"If any thing cannot be true by certain and clear places of the Scriptures, let man's presumption stay itself, not leaning to either part." Or those of Bishop Jeremy Taylor—"It were good, if standing in the measure of the Divine law, we should lay a snare for no man's feet by putting fetters upon his liberty without just cause, but not without great, great danger."

We close with the well-chosen words of a great man and illustrious scholar:—"If I have erred, it is in good company. I have the countenance of Luther and Melancthon on a similar point; of Chalmers, Whately, Thirlwall, Wesley, Bunting, Robinson, and many more divines, with all the great names in Hebrew philology and commentary; men who, released from the solemn frippery, tedious casuistry, and perplexing despotism of the Canon Law, form their own independent conclusions as to the meaning of the sacred records."—(John Eadie, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Theology to the U. P. Church, in exposition of Leviticus xviii. 18.)

May God, in His great mercy, grant to the Presbyterian Church of Victoria wisdom equal to her times. Amen.

## A P P E N D I X.

WHILE correcting the proofs of the foregoing pages, Dr. Cameron's pamphlet reached us. We have read it carefully, but have only been confirmed in our own views by the Doctor's ponderous production. The Doctor fails to see that his "familiar principle of interpretation" has no bearing on the passage in dispute. If the wife after her death was to remain in the family, and sustain the same relations to her husband, as she did before her death—*i.e.*, be liable to be influenced by the presence and doings of her sister-wife—there would then be some pertinence in his citing such passages as "Remember your Creator," &c.—for an individual remains and sustains the same relation to God in his manhood as in his youth, and God to him. The Doctor is as fallacious in the second part of his argument, for in it he appears to be uninformed regarding the fact that married sisters with children, under the same roof, are more jealous of attentions paid to the one and her children over the other and hers than women who were strangers before their marriage, and that by their jealousies and strifes they produce a far greater amount of suffering than other women in like circumstance. Of this fact Moses was fully aware, as he shews us in what he records, of the heart-burnings in Jacob's family. While he speaks of the jealousy and strife of the two sisters, he gives not the slightest hint of any approach to such on the part of their handmaids. If the jealousy of married sisters having children, and living under the same roof, be much greater and more bitter than of other women in like circumstances, then we see the wisdom of Moses, while permitting polygamy, forbidding that sisters should be brought into such a relation. In this view of the case we see the meaning of "*in her lifetime*," or, as the Doctor would have it, "*all her days*," a distinction without a difference. "The abomination" of which the Doctor makes so much could be nothing but the consummation of the marriage which, in the case of sisters, would be such an abomination as to justify Moses forbidding it. The Doctor's argument is, after all, but a superficial gloss, instead of a learned interpretation of the text. An unsophisticated mind will see the text to be a simple prohibition of marriage with the sister of a wife during her lifetime, for it is only during the lifetime of a wife that the taking of her sister to wife could vex her, hence the restriction is *during her lifetime*, for it is only then that the uncovering of her nakedness could vex her. We have other difficulties in connection with Dr. Cameron's pamphlet, passing by the adulation so cordially given to his "*facile princeps*," the sarcasm of "a cartload of the opinions of 'authorities' ostentatiously paraded on the other side," so uncalled for. We cannot overlook the more serious defects into which his homage to the traditions of the Fathers has drawn an acute and cultivated intellect; and this we do out of no disrespect of a "brother beloved," whom we highly esteem, but in the name of truth; *e.g.*, Dr. Cameron holds that the marriage law as laid down in Lev. xviii. is neither municipal nor Judaic, but moral, "the Divine law of nature," intended for all nations and times, and yet at the same time he admits that the eighteenth verse of the same chapter, and which is a portion of the same law, countenances polygamy—*ergo*, polygamy is lawful for all times and for all nations. Can Dr. Cameron lift us out of this difficulty? Further, in his exegesis of the words "to uncover her nakedness," he says not a single instance can be adduced in which the phrase is used to indicate lawful intercourse. If this exegesis be correct, then the prohibitions contained in the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus have no reference to marriage at all. What, then, comes of the marriage law?—the Divine law of nature for all times and all people! Or apply it to the verse in hand, and it upsets the very law of that verse which says "thou shalt not take a *wife* to her sister." Again, the Doctor, in his "Exegesis," asserts that the eighteenth verse means, "Thou shalt not take

a wife to vex her, by the sin and shame of an incestuous husband all the days of her life." According to this "Exegesis," it is not the second wife that is the cause of the vexation, but the husband himself. This "Exegesis" does violence to the grammar of the verse. Besides, it is somewhat difficult to see how, in every supposable case, the first sister should see the sin and shame of an incestuous husband, and be vexed thereby, while the second sister should always be so widely different in her mental constitution that she should see no sin and shame in it, and consequently suffer no vexation; and, further, the sin and shame of taking a second sister, while the first is living, cannot necessarily be either a sin or a shame when the first is dead. Once more, the Doctor declares that when a man unites himself to a woman in marriage, he accepts her relations to her blood kindred in the forbidden degrees, which is to put marriage with them out of the question. According to this view of the case, marriage between first cousins is incestuous.

Dr. Cameron's review of the literature of the controversy is as unsatisfactory. Although the Doctor can afford to throw overboard a cartload of authorities, he may ponder the following note, from what is commonly known as the *Speaker's Commentary*, which may be regarded as an altogether impartial view of the matter in dispute:—

"1. The rule, as it here stands, would seem to bear no other meaning than that a man is not to form a connection with his wife's sister while his wife is alive. It appears to follow that the law permitted marriage with the sister of a deceased wife. A limitation being expressly laid down in the words 'beside the other in her lifetime,' it may be inferred that when the limitation is removed, the prohibition loses its force, and permission is implied.

"The testimony of the Rabbinical Jews in the Targums, the Mishna, and their later writings; that of the Hellenistic Jews in the Septuagint and Philo (*de Spec. Ligg.* iii. 5); that of the early and mediæval church, in the old Italic; the Vulgate; with the other early versions of the Old Testament, and in every reference to the text in the Fathers and Schoolmen, are unanimous in supporting, or in not in any way opposing, the common rendering of the passage. This interpretation indeed appears to have passed unchallenged from the third century before Christ to the middle of the sixteenth century after Christ."

We regret to be compelled to add, "how doctors differ." Dr. Cairns (page 10) says:—"Opposite that verse in our old Bibles there is a marginal rendering which, upon good grounds, is considered to be a more faithful reading of the original than the translation given in the text; instead of a wife to her sister, the marginal is *one wife to another*. This preserves the consistency of the law, and is, we doubt not, the true meaning." Dr. Cameron (page 21) says:—"If the marginal rendering were the correct one, the words would of course have nothing to do with marriage with a deceased wife's sister, but would contain simply a prohibition of polygamy. The rendering of the text, however, is to be preferred; indeed, I have the conviction based on grammatical and other grounds that it is the only rendering admissible." How absurd the idea of compelling us to one mode of thinking, when the men who assume to be our guides so differ on the very threshold of the matter! They would do well to consider the advice of Gamaliel.



